

Stanford/SFP: Leaving on a Jet Plane

It's always odd how extraordinary things are just like their ordinary counterparts. Stanford is just like a school, only wealthier. Leaving home is just like going on vacation, only longer. And packing your dorm is just like packing up your hotel room, only bigger.

Tonight the campus is so desolate: people missing, cars missing. Even the room is beginning to seem empty, although the hallways are filled with crud. I'm the last one left in our room of four people. With all my schoolwork done, it's surprisingly lonely. I wander down to talk to other people packing.

As I wait outside with my bags the next morning, kids slowly filter out and sit on the top of the picnic table, just like the cool kids do in television shows to indicate coolness. I sit away in the shade on the chair. Eventually my ride shows up and the group of kids waves goodbye. I wonder how many of them I'll see again.

Bags are heavy. It's a good thing I didn't take public transportation — there's no way I would have made it. Not to mention the fact that when I get here a voice over the speakers says that public transportation is currently out. I wait in line for a long time at the curb until I get to the front and they tell me they can't check my bags anymore. Then I spend a while running around looking for a cart machine that will take my money, then I take the cart over to another long line and pay a lot of money to take my bags on the plane. Good thing I'm early. I still have two heavy bags to carry all the way to the terminal, unfortunately. Somehow I survive without any major damage.

On the plane I read a long book which inspires me to write a long memoir.

I then carry the heavy bags down to the baggage claim, buy another cart, grab the bags of the conveyor belt, take them to the cab stand and ask the cab driver to go to MIT. He doesn't know where Simmons Hall is so he tells me to stop him when we get close. I scan the windows, seeing nothing but empty fields and abandoned warehouses when BOOM! this huge building pops up, much larger than it seems in pictures. "That's it!" I say and the cabdriver backs up. He places my stuff on the curb as I pay him and speeds off.

Inside an alienated student mans the desk, her lowered eyes not-so-subtly implying that she really doesn't want to talk to me. I tell her I'm checking in. 'Oh,' she says in a dry monotone, 'you're that guy. I thought you'd be older.' She gives me a key and asks me to fill out a confusing form, continually finding spots I haven't filled out. 'No, fill out everything — you left the box that says "# of children" blank.' While I'm doing this some police come in and ask how to get to tower B, she points them to the elevator at the end of the hall.

Finally I finish filling out the form and ask her how to get to my room. She looks it up and concludes it's in tower B, take the elevator at the end of the hall. I decide to go on an exploratory mission with just one bag to find my room before carrying everything down. It's a good thing I did since the elevator is surrounded by three cops. In front of them, the elevator door is open revealing a whole group of kids in an elevator stuck halfway between floors. The kids seem resigned to their situation and are now sitting on the floor playing games. 'I don't trust these f---ing elevators,' says one cop. 'No way, me neither,' answers another. I decide to back away to give them some space.

After a short rest I decide to try the other elevator and it turns out it's much closer, so I laboriously drag my bags up and thru using it. On the way to my room there is a picture window onto a deck with some sort of yin-yang sculpture. The kids have filled it up with water and place rubber duckies into it. Unfortunately, getting onto the deck requires a keycard, which I don't have.

Simmons Hall is indeed pretty, if a little warm. (Apparently the computer lab is the only air conditioned room.) Meeting rooms of various sorts are scattered throughout the place, each fitted with a whiteboard and prints from Josef Albers's *Interaction of Color*.

Oddly, each print is also accompanied by a note with a number to call with "questions and concerns" about the artwork. (I imagine the MIT student who calls and says "I have a concern about print #49. Albers clearly intended to use a 3,4,5 sequence but on the last square here it's printed as 3,4,6. Do you think you could send someone to take care of this?")

There are also a series of kitchens and TV rooms, each differently shaped and furnished. Each TV room has a DVD player, VCR, and stairs up to the next floor where, in a different location, there is another room with a different shape and furnishings.

The floor plans of the building are printed by the elevator (for use in case of fire, I guess) and they're rather entertaining. They look just like normal floor plans — squares and boxes with symbolic codes — except it's apparently been hit by a meteor, since there's a big squiggly-shaped hole right in the middle where the TV room is.

In one of the meeting rooms I found [a large box](#) someone had built out of wood, the inside covered in foam padding. Inside was a strange-looking device, a switch, and a bunch of wires. Outside was a light (currently off) that said "DIRECT FROM THE FUTURE". I tried figuring out what the box was, with little success. The whole thing felt like a puzzle out of Myst or something.

The one thing I couldn't find, however, was a bathroom on my floor. I found a whole series of locked rooms with interesting labels — Counseling, Student Government, Mail, Music, and my personal favorite (if only because it was the one with no lock) Meditation — but no bathroom. Finally I tried to open the unmarked door next to my room and aha! a bathroom. Nice location, too. The only problem is it doesn't have lock.

The next day as I walk outside I'm hit in the face by Cambridge's dreadful weather. Unbearably snowy in the winter, it's unbearably hot and muggy in the summer. I guess it wasn't just because I was carrying bags yesterday that I was sweating. I walk the superblock to the student center where I get some food and buy a fan for my room. It makes things a little better but it's still pretty terrible.

Anyone in Cambridge got an air conditioner I could borrow? Maybe I should find someplace to buy one. **UPDATE:** The good folks at Y Combinator brought me over an air conditioner which we jammed into one of the windows and now it's awesome. *Thanks!*

Finally, if anyone nearby wants to visit, just drop me an email.

You should follow me on twitter [here](#).

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